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ABSTRACT

To evaluate the Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ), an organization whose aim is to achieve universal literacy in Zimbabwe, a study interviewed officials at ALOZ, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and other institutions involved in literacy development; reviewed relevant literature and documents; administered questionnaires; and conducted field observations and interviews with new learners and beneficiaries. ALOZ has worked through a partnership model, inviting economic and social enterprises in the country to sponsor literacy programs for their workers and communities. The design of the study included the selection of 12 different social settings ranging from big city industrial areas, mines and railways, and a large-scale dairy farm, to small city locations, rural settlements, and communal areas. In each setting, a cluster of respondents (for a total of 227) were chosen: learners, teachers, supervisors, administrators, agents of sponsoring and collaborating institutions, etc. Both Shona and Sindebele language areas were covered. People working at the headquarters of ALOZ were also interviewed. Results indicated that, in Zimbabwe, literacy has come to be a part of the definition of adulthood. Without exception, learners claimed that literacy had improved their lives, irrespective of the level of literacy attained. The most important consequences of literacy appeared inside the home in regard to the change in family relationships, with women and children benefitting from this change. Other areas influenced by literacy included economics, health, and politics. Policy makers should be aware that literacy is at the core of human development. (MM)

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THE USES AND CONSEQUENCES OF LITERACY IN THE DAILY LIVES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE: FROM AN EVALUATION OF ADULT LITERACY ORGANIZATION OF ZIMBABWE (ALOZ)

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THE USES AND CONSEQUENCES OF LITERACY

IN THE DAILY LIVES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE:

FROM AN EVALUATION OF

ADULT LITERACY ORGANIZATION OF ZIMBABWE (ALOZ)

I was recently in Zimbabwe, on the invitation of the USAID Mission in the country, to conduct an evaluation of the work of the Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ). What I present to you today is not simply a condensation of the report submitted to USAID/ZIMBABWE. Instead, I plan to share with you some of the incidental and the ancillary learnings I acquired in the course of this evaluation. This learning -- some of it relearning -- was essentially about the uses ordinary people make of literacy in the usual routines of their day-to-day lives; and about the consequences that accrue to them from literacy acquisition. The stories are worth telling because together these stories seem to add up to a theory, which in turn, has important implications for policy. I hope this will interest you.

BY WAY OF CONTEXT

The Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ) had its beginnings in the Build-a-Nation Campaign of the early 1960s, when a group of individuals in Zimbabwe realized that "literacy was essential to bridge the communication gap between some sections of the community", in other words, between Black and White Rhodesians. ALOZ's aim has been to achieve universal literacy in Zimbabwe. The focus, understandably, has been on the Black populations. ALOZ has worked through a partnership model, inviting

economic and social enterprises, in the country to sponsor literacy programs for their workers and communities. The partner institutions appoint teachers, sponsor them for training through courses conducted by ALOZ, undertake to pay for the teachers' salaries when they return from training, buy or subsidise teaching materials to be used by teachers and learners, and provide the needed instructional facilities. ALOZ offers leadership and technical support through training of teachers, production and sale of suitable literacy and post-literacy materials and supervision of classes, if requested.

USAID SUPPORT TO ALOZ

Two grants, totalling around one million US dollars had been made by USAID/ZIMBABWE to the Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ): first, entitled, "Adult Literacy Teacher Training and Text Production, September 1981; and second, entitled, "Books for New Literates, November, 1982. The grant period, including extensions, terminated in July 1986.

In August 1988, USAID/ZIMBABWE commissioned an evaluation of the impact of these two grants on ALOZ and, through ALOZ, on literacy in the country. The more specific purposes of the present evaluation was to see the impact of USAID grants on the Africanization and institutionalization of ALOZ; on its programs of teacher training, materials production, and supervision; and, ultimately, on the capacity of ALOZ to influence the lives of illiterate adults, particularly women, in rural and urban areas of Zimbabwe.

Three evaluation questions were posed:

How has ALOZ affected the literacy efforts in Zimbabwe?

Has ALOZ affected the ability of new literates to earn more income?

Have the skills ALOZ taught new literates helped them improve their work, production and improve their standard of living?

THE METHODOLOGICAL EXPECTATIONS

The methodological expectations of USAID/ALOZ evaluation are captured in the following paragraph from the contract document:

> "The methodology which will be used for this evaluation will include literature and document review, interviews with officials at ALOZ, AID and other institutions involved in literacy; development, field testing and administering questionnaires; and field interviews (with new learners and beneficiaries)."

Thus, while there was the expectation that we talk to both the providers and the beneficiaries, and that we record their responses in field-tested questionnaires, there were few other methodological expectations. This evaluator happens to be a methodological pragmatist. We did what was expected, including the design and field-testing of questionnaires and interview schedules. But we went farther. We accommodated the methodological requirements within an expanded new paradigm of evaluation. For example, we made no pretensions of "doing science", on Zimbabwe farms and factory floors. We merely sought "to make sense" of what we saw and then make "warranted assertions" on the basis of which USAID and ALOZ could make defensible policy choices and practical program decisions. In

making these warranted assertions, we did whatever was desirable and feasible in the circumstances.

The evaluation thus used a combination of the quantitative and the qualitative methods. It used documentary analysis, interviews with a variety of stakeholders in the program, and it used field observations. The design of the study included the selection of twelve different social settings ranging from big city industrial areas, mines and railways, a large-scale dairy farm, to small city locations, rural settlements, and communal areas. In each setting, a whole cluster of respondents were chosen: learners, teachers, supervisors, administrators, agents of sponsoring and collaborating institutions, etc. Both Shona and Sindebele language areas were covered. The final count of respondents included the following:

Category of Respondents	Region 1	Region 2	Total
Learners	93	53	146
Indirect Beneficiaries	8	5	13
Family Members	15	10	25
Teachers	15	6	21
Agents of Sponsoring Institutions	6	3	9
Agents of Collaborating Institutions	3	0	3
Trainers	2	2	4
Supervisors	2	4	6

People working at the headquarters of ALOZ -- writers, section heads, deputy director and director -- were also interviewed. A two-tier data analysis was used. First, short case studies were written, one for each community or social setting. Then, the various stakeholders from all the different settings were put together and given one synoptic look.

One can always dismiss a lot of evaluation, faulting it for a lack of the so-called "objectivity." One can say, for example, that interviews are useless because answers are "demanded" by questions; and all questions have the germs of answers in them already. Evaluation in an international and intercultural setting is indeed uncertain. Outside evaluators seldom know the language and culture of evaluands well enough to have an encounter with reality first-hand. Both ideas and perceptions are mediated by the informer and the local field investigator. Questions in this particular evaluation were written in English and then translated into Shona or Sindebele by the local field investigators for the benefit of each respondent. The answers provided by the respondents in Shona or Sindebele were translated back into English. Under these conditions, the questionnaires, by necessity, became excuses for conversations. Our claim, based on our immersion in the field realities, and later in our data, is that respondents shared their constructions with us in "a mood of mutuality" and with authenticity. The various responses from a multiplicity of stakeholders, living and working in a variety of social settings, all added up to a mutually reinforcing, coherent picture that seemed credible.

THE VOICES OF LEARNERS

We might begin by saying that literacy today is no foreign element of domination being imposed by outsiders on oral cultures existing in some wonderfully happy equilibrium of structures and functions. There are no oral cultures around anymore, though different cultures provide different kinds of symbiosis between literacy and oracy. It could infact be stated that in today´s world literacy has come to be a part of the definition of adulthood itself. The dependency of the illiterate adult on the literate invites attributions of childishness. As a new learner from a rural area of Zimbabwe put it: "It is not easy to be an illiterate in Zimbabwe anymore." Indeed, Zimbabwe can not afford to be an oral culture today. The hunger for education is both acute and wide-spread. Both adult men and women want to become literate. Some of the motivations for literacy are in the high tradition: learners want to receive the "new world of knowledge." Some of the motivations are quite practical: learners want to find work, to seek promotion, to read instructions at work, to read vouchers and savings books, to make family budgets, to shop, and not be embarrassed by entering the wrong public toilet. Some seek to end exploitation in the immediate network of personal relationships: to know what the husband keeps from his pay check and what he gives to the wife to run the household; or to look out for the husband´s mail to discourage him from keeping girl-friends.

The consequences of literacy have been remarkable. Without a single exception, adult learners, both men and women, the quite young and the very old, claimed that literacy had improved

learners´ lives, irrespective of the level of literacy attained and the subsequent contexure of its use. Learners´ "minds opened up" and they could "do things without help." "Everything improved"; "everything became uptodate."

A surge of confidence in oneself was universal and seemed to be intoxicating. Learners had indeed emerged from "a culture of silence." They have found their voices and their voices were often poignant. The learners said that they felt free, not shy, not inferior, unafraid. They felt transformed. If not a new "technology of intellect", there certainly was a new "social re-invention of oneself." Literacy had become the great equalizer of men and women.

Even those who had learned very little literacy, found some uses for literacy. These uses were "functional" in the learners´ particular contexts. They had broken through the black curtain of the printer´s ink and now felt independent even if all they read were letters, bus signs and numbers on the pay-slip or the post-office savings-book. Some went further to read newspapers, the Bible, school books for examinations, or novels for pleasure. They wrote letter to spouses and children away from home, kept accounts, made budgets; and became the "holders of the pen" at the meetings of clubs and party cells.

The most important consequences of literacy may have appeared inside the home in regard to the change in family relationships. Both women and children have been the beneficiaries of this significant change in relationships. Husbands have given some breathing space to their wives. Said

one man: "I have realized that a woman is an important thing." Said a woman: "The husband no longer steals the show." Husbands and wives were able to discuss, respect, and compromise. Parents were able to control their tempers. Children were treated better. Some new learners helped their children with school work; and all of them sent their children to school.

Literacy has important economic consequences -- more for the farmer and housewife than, perhaps, for the wage earner. The wage earner is often caught in a wage structure that does not change easily or often to allow quick movement up the salary ladder. However, the informal economy is in the farmer´s and the housewife´s own hands. They can do something with their learnings without waiting for the structures to respond. It is in the informal economy then that more significant affects seem to have appeared. Families were able to grow more food in their family gardens and add high nutrition content to their meals. So many of them started their own small poultry farms and so many women had income generating activities that enabled them to buy school uniforms for their children and add other items to their households. On the farms, the literate farmers were able to do "scientific farming", making appropriate uses of crop rotation, fertilizers and pesticides.

Literacy brought new learnings in health and nutrition. New literates learned to take steps to prevent diseases by cutting tall grass around the house, digging rubbish pits, building toilets, and protecting their wells. They took their children for vaccination, and were able to make rehyderation solutions when diarrhea struck. Most understood the extension

advice. Some initiated contact with the extenstion agents on their own. A few adopted family planning.

At work, there was greater trust, less paranoia. People were no more unnecessarily suspicious of each other and were able to work together more effectively. There were promotions at work for some.

Women who earlier could not see beyond the compound now saw opportunities outside the home. They learned new social relations and management skills as they participated in the so-called income-generating activities that were part of the functional literacy programs. Many established businesses that encompassed larger social and economic territories. There had clearly been tremendous psychic mobility.

The preceding should not suggest that literacy has become a universally accepted social good. The unfortunate fact of life is that human beings do not always watch their own interests or act in their own behalf. It then becomes important for leadership at community, regional, national and international levels to teach people the values of literacy, at the same time that they seek to teach them literacy. Too often those who go to attend literacy classes are ridiculed by their peers who do not go to these classes and they are being neglected by the development workers in the name of more urgent needs. This must change.

THEORETICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As was stated earlier, we do not claim to do science in the meaning of a chemist or an agriculturist. We seek to make

sense of what might have happend as a consequence of USAID contributions to the programs of ALOZ over a particular time period in particular areas (where lot of other things were happening at the same time). We do not seek to prove links of causality between literacy and individual, social and economic consequences. What we claim are "links of plausability" between literacy and significant changes in the lives of learners.

It seems warrantable to assert:

that literacy, even at the lowest level of functionality, that is, even when the new-literate has done no more than stumble on the margins of the culture of print, significantly redefines the individual and adds potential to the individual learner;

that at the individual level, literacy does effect social identities; and creates mutual and democratic relationships within families and among peers;

that literacy has immediate effects on the lives of learners within the context of their control, that is, family, informal economy, and relationships within the community; and

that literacy may be generating that "creative and constructive discontent" with the status quo that demands social, economic and political structures to become more responsive to the needs of peoples.

Some policy implications should now be clarified:

Policy makers should stop looking for "proof" of returns on literacy. That is no more than a strategy of postponement. The network of plausible correlations that exists between literacy and the development of culture and technology should be

enough for policy makers to take appropriate actions. Literate adults and youth, without reservation or qualification, should be seen as a national -- and an international -- resource.

Policy makers should look for impact not only within the formal economy, and formal structures but also within the informal economy and within the informal organization of the family and community, that is, within the areas of individual´s locus of control. Policy makers should focus particularly on the inner frontiers of the individual, on literacy as potential added. This should by no means imply that literacy policies should not be handled at national (or even at international) levels but should be left to individuals and local communities. Indeed, the national and the local should be integrated into a network of initiatives from all levels. There is no contradiction in having a national literacy campaign or a nation-wide program that allows local definition of program objectives. Re-invention of national visions in local settings is completely possible.

Policy makers should, as far as possible, offer programs of literacy based on functionality. No fancy curriculum development exercises are, however, necessary to integrate literacy with income generating activities. It is enough that the same group of learners participates in the literacy class and in the economic activity. Integration can be further ensured if the literacy teacher on the one hand, and the extension worker on the other hand, will often talk to each other and sometimes work together.

Policy makers should specifically consider the dividends of literacy in terms of affirmative action in behalf of women; scholarization of children; intergenerational consequences of

literacy; accrual of knowledge capital to new literates, and contributions to the effectiveness of all aspects of extension work conducted by other development agencies of governments.

Literacy dividends should be seen not only in terms of the learners in classes but also in terms of indirect beneficiaries of literacy work, the families of learners and the communities where they live and to where they bring the new print culture and new economic activities. More specifically, policy makers should include the literacy teacher in their accounting of social and economic returns, for teachers do more than teach literacy classes. They become the new secular leaders in their communities and mediate a multiplicity of innovations. Thus, training inputs made in literacy teachers provide manifold returns.

There is no place in the world today that is not part of the literate environment. Literacy is needed today in the Kalahari desert and in the isolated villages in the Himalayan hills. Government, religion, work, and entertainment are all based on the assumptions of literacy. Sharing of information capital and of related power is impossible without literacy.

Policy makers should not look at literacy work as something that will one day be finished once for all. Literacy should be seen as a differentiated and continuous process. As there will always be need for primary schools and universities, so will adult literacy (and at a later historical time adult education) remain a continuous and never-ending process. This is not to suggest that we should allow conditions that first create

illiterates sometimes in, and sometimes inspite of, our schools, to be later served by adult education or adult literacy programs. What we suggest is that we will always need literacy programs though of ever differing complexions and contents, respoding to the ever changing needs of the future.

This leads to the need for a permanent role for "education extention." We should conceptualize a permanent role of the education extension worker. It could be a combination of a rural librarian, literacy teacher, discussion leader, community development worker, mediator for distance education programs, director of a learning resource center and an educational activist all rolled in one. We are not dreaming, of course. Botswana has already converted the temporary jobs of fifty of its 250 District Literacy Coordinators (DLC´s) into Education Extension Officers. Over a period of time their role could grow into something like what we have conceptualized above.

Policy makers should see the serendipitous effects of literacy on secular social organization. Literacy classes, we have found, become the core of social organization for people to do other things. Indeed, some groups with social and economic agendas die because they do not anymore have the fall-back structure of the literacy class.

To sum, policy makers must be aware that literacy is not a myth. It is at the core of human development. It is a human right. One can never go wrong in making investments in literacy promotion of the people, whatever the time and place, and whatever

the socio-economic and cultural setting. Indeed, it may be wise to return to literacy projects and programs that may have been abandoned, to rehabilitate them by building up on the already sunk costs and on the already grounded experience.